

Burn Barrels: A Burning Health Problem

What's so bad about burn barrels?

Maybe you guessed that smoke from your burn barrel isn't good for you, but do you know how bad it really is? The immediate effects are:

- ◆ Eye, nose, and throat irritation
- ◆ Stomach or intestinal upset
- ◆ Lung irritation and congestion
- ◆ Headache or memory loss
- ◆ Skin irritations and burns

There is also increased risk of long-term health problems, including:

- ◆ Cancer
- ◆ Learning Disorders
- ◆ Leukemia
- ◆ Birth Defects
- ◆ Asthma
- ◆ Infertility
- ◆ Immune System Changes

When you choose to burn, you affect not just your own health, but the health of your children, your neighbors, and your animals. Children, teenagers, pregnant women, and the elderly are at highest risk.

Burn barrels are especially bad because the fires burn at low temperatures. They receive very little oxygen and produce a lot of smoke that contains toxic substances. What's worse is that almost all of the pollutants released into the air are close to the ground where they are easily inhaled.

Avoid burning the following materials

You should try to avoid burning all of the following materials because they release toxic substances when they are burned:

- ◆ Plastic
- ◆ Petroleum products
- ◆ Paper
- ◆ Dead animal
- ◆ Cardboard
- ◆ Treated wood
- ◆ Asphalt
- ◆ Rubber products

◆ Any substance, other than natural vegetation, that releases toxic emissions, dense smoke or obnoxious odors when burned.

We've always done it that way!

A generation ago, trash consisted largely of paper, wood, food and yard waste. Today, trash often contains plastics, metals, rubber, synthetic cloth and chemicals. Even the slick, colored paper of magazines and the see-through plastic portions of billing envelopes send toxic fumes into the air. A few of the toxic chemicals released are dioxins, benzene, nitrogen oxides, and toluene. These chemicals enter the air, soil, groundwater and food supply.

Tests performed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency show that daily dioxin emissions from household burn barrels used by two to 40 families equal the air pollution from a garbage incinerator that serves thousands of families. All of this pollution is released in your backyard!

How can I protect myself and my family?

The best way to protect yourself is to not burn. Choose a different method of disposing of your garbage. Here are some alternatives to burning:

1. **REDUCE** your household waste. Choose products with less packaging - especially less plastic.
2. **REUSE** products and packaging as much as possible. Donate unwanted clothing, furniture and toys to friends or charities. Give unwanted magazines to hospitals or nursing homes. Mend and repair rather than discard and replace.
3. **RECYCLE** newspaper, plastic, glass and metal. You might even be able to recycle mixed paper, cardboard and other materials.
4. **COMPOST** organic kitchen waste and yard waste. Compost or pile everything into a heap in your yard. While the ash from your barrel is dangerous on your garden, the compost is great. Chip large branches and use as mulch.
5. **DISPOSAL**: As a last resort, have your household waste picked up by a licensed waste removal company or take it to a licensed disposal facility (landfill or incinerator).